Bollywood Cinema: A Transnational/Cultural Role

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Summary

There has always been a strong link between India's social and political history and Bollywood cinema. Within the context of the nationalist movement in India, Bollywood cinema has played an important role in constructing various dichotomies such as tradition/modernity, Indian/Western and spiritual/material. By negotiating with these binaries, Bollywood narratives have contributed to the dialogue on women's roles and position in Indian society. In the past, Bollywood filmmakers were faithful to represent-ations of women who were bound by patriarchal structures in the sense that they were expected to be loyal to ancient Indian traditions and belief-systems. Based on the increase in Indian migration, contemporary Bollywood filmmakers are now catering to the demands of the Indian diaspora and therefore, a more global market. Diasporic Bollywood films provide audiences with material that suggests re-thinking patriarchal structures in a transnational world. This article examines the impact that trans-nationalism has had on the Indian diaspora and the manner in which this translates into the narratives and representations of female characters in popular Bollywood films. Through the progression of time, Bollywood cinema has evolved. As a result, it has become a transnational/cultural role player for Indian audiences worldwide.

Opsomming

Daar was nog altyd 'n sterk verband tussen Indië se sosiale en politieke geskiedenis en Bollywoodfilms. Bollywoodfilms het binne die konteks van die nasionalistiese beweging in Indië 'n belangrike rol gespeel om verskillende digotomieë saam te voeg, onder andere tradisie/moderniteit, Indies/Westers en spiritueel/materieel. Narratiewe in Bollywoodfilms het binne die omtrekke van hierdie binêre pare rond-beweeg om sodoende by te dra tot die gesprek oor vrouens se rolle en posisies in die Indiese samelewing. Bollywoodfilmmakers het in die verlede getrou gebly aan uitbeeldings wat vroue ingeperk het binne patriargale strukture, deurdat daar van hulle verwag is om lojaal te wees aan outydse Indiese tradisies en geloof-sisteme. Die toename in Indiërmigrasie het veroorsaak dat huidige Bollywood-filmmakers nou meer omsien na die behoeftes van die Indiese diaspora en dus meer gerig is op 'n globale mark. Diasporiese Bollywoodfilms gee aan gehore materiaal wat patriargale strukture in 'n transnasionale wêreld oopstel vir herbetragting. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die impak wat transnasionalisme gehad het op die Indiese diaspora en die wyse waarop hierdie aspek uiting kry in die narratiewe en uitbeeldings van vroulike karakters in populêre Bollywoodfilms. Bollywoodfilms het met die verloop van tyd ontwikkel en as gevolg daarvan het dit 'n transnasionale/kulturele rolspeler vir Indiese gehore wêreldwyd geword.

Introduction

> Bollywood is a tongue-in-cheek term created by the English language press in India in the late 1970's. It has now become the dominant global term to refer to the prolific and box-office oriented Hindi-language film industry located in Mumbai.
>
> (Ganti 2004: 2)

Bollywood films have been examined as cultural texts from as far back as the mid-1980s (Dudrah & Desai 2008: 1). Over the past two decades, academic interest in Bollywood cinema has increased and scholars have studied Bollywood cinema from various angles (Dasgupta 1996; Nandy 1998, 2008; Uberoi 1998; Mankekar 1999; Allesandrini 2001; Virdi 2003; Krueger 2004; Rajadhyaksha 2003; Desai 2004; Hirji 2005; Gangoli 2005; Kaur & Sinha 2005; Ramamurthy 2006; Mishra 2002, 2008); Brosius & Yazgi 2007; Sarrazin 2008; Bandyopadhyay 2008; Dwyer 2005, 2010; Rao 2010; Gooptu 2011; Varia 2012; Ganti: 2002, 2004, 2012). A study of Bollywood films provides a fascinating account of Indian history and cultural politics (Virdi 2003: 1). Even though the history and politics may not be depicted entirely accurately since the narratives of most Bollywood films are fictional, a general understanding of the cultures and practices in India are realised in these films. As Kavoori and Punathambekar (2008: 2) observe,

> Cinema in India has been studied as a profoundly important national-popular domain that has negotiated various transitions and conflicts in the socio-cultural fabric of India from the early twentieth century.

Over the years, a growing number of studies have supported the idea that there is a link between India's social and political history and Bollywood cinema (Uberoi 1998; Rajadhyaksha 1998, 2003; Prasad 2000, 2003; Virdi 2003; Tejaswini Niranjana 2006; Rachel Dwyer 2005, 2010). This article should therefore be read with the understanding that there are often various politics that affect representations in popular Bollywood films.

Brief Overview: Origins of Bollywood Films

When studying Bollywood cinema, it is essential to be aware of the causal relationship that exists between popular Bollywood films and Indian society. Based on the understanding of this relationship, Bollywood cinema has, to a large extent, been shaped by various cultural practices in India. An understanding of the origins of Bollywood cinema is necessary to be able to comprehend the various conventions, strategies and representations that are seen within the context of many Bollywood films. According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004: 98), both classical Sanskrit theatre and Parsi theatre

have impacted on representations in Bollywood films. While Sanskrit theatre is known for being 'highly stylised with an emphasis on spectacle' (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 2004: 98), it is from Parsi theatre that the content of many older Bollywood films was derived. As Pande (2006: 1646) notes,

> From Parsi theatre, Hindi cinema also inherited its audiences and many of its histrionic traditions.

Historical sources indicate that the Parsi community migrated from Iran to Mumbai, India (Cohen 2001: 316). This minority group practiced the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia and was very much influenced by European culture (Cohen 2001: 316). According to Kulke (quoted in Cohen 2001: 316), the Parsis studied European classical music, enjoyed ballroom dancing and established literary clubs.

Parsi theatre was largely influenced by mid-Victorian stage conventions and the display of over-the-top performances.

Cohen (2001: 316) briefly outlines the basic characteristics of Parsi theatre,

- Performances were generally long; they often began at around nine or ten o'clock in the evening and continued into the early hours of the morning (between two a.m. and dawn).
- Performances contained a mixture of elements such as song, dance and comedy.
- Content was drawn from diverse sources such as Sanskrit epics, Shakespeare, local legend and history.

For the audiences of the times, Parsi theatre was a wonderful form of art that they thoroughly enjoyed. Based on the audience's reception and commercial success of Parsi theatre, many Bollywood filmmakers integrated various conventions of this popular theatre into their on-screen narratives (Prasad 1998: 30-31). However, while Parsi theatre was successful (Prasad 1998: 30; Cohen 2001: 318), films that adopted this style of representation were criticised. As Thomas (2008: 1) argues, "these films were ignored within the context of first world culture and society". Clearly, films that adopted the conventions of Parsi theatre were viewed with mixed responses by different audiences. While many Bollywood filmmakers to this day often integrate the conventions of early Parsi theatre into their narratives, others have broken away from this method of representation. The discussion that follows highlights the major changes that have been made in terms of representations in Bollywood films over the years. It is interesting that many representations have been inadvertently shaped by the tastes of audiences in India.

Audience Reception/Tastes

Ganti (2004: 24) differentiates between three eras of filmmaking in India: post-1947 after India attained independence, the early 1970s during which there was widespread political and social unrest and post-1991, which was a period influenced by economic liberalisation. According to Hemphill (1998: 177), during the post-1947 period, the general masses in India accepted a certain formulaic representation of film, which was fashioned on certain stereotypical narratives.[1] In other words, the format of these films were fashioned upon older conventions of ancient theatre forms and included the following,

- A version of a romantic narrative,
- A comedy track;
- An average of six songs per film;
- A range of familiar character types;
- Narrative closure in which the hero restores a threatened moral/social order.

(Prasad 1998: 31)

The combination of the above elements created a film which adhered to a specific format of representation. This format has come to be referred to as the *masala*[2] film. Nandy[3] (2008: 77) provides a more comprehensive reading of the *masala* film,

> The popular Bollywood film has to have everything from the classical to the folk, from the sublime to the ridiculous, and from the terribly modern to the incorrigibly, traditional ... an average "normal" Bombay film has to be, to the extent possible, everything to everyone. It has to cut across the myriad of ethnicities and lifestyles of India and even of the world that impinges on India.

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1.   The audience in India is made up of millions of people and its choice of which films are worth repeat viewing has a significant influence on the type of films made. *There are preferences for particular stereotypes and particular relationships.* (Hemphill 1988: 177, authors' emphasis)

2.   Literally, the term masala means "mixture". Within the context of categorising Bollywood films, it refers to the all-encompassing genre which features drama, comedy, song and dance and action that have been characteristic of much popular Hindi/Bollywood cinema (Dudrah & Desai 2008: 279) or formula films (Ganti 2004), and were characterised by a preference for visual and non-verbal modes of address.

3.   Nandi's observations date back to the mindset of Indian audiences from the mid-1990s.

It is notable, that of India's 900 million people, an average of 10 million moviegoers buy tickets every day, and many of these people "often pay a whole day's earning to sit in the dark for nearly three hours" (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 2004: 12). Interestingly, this format gained popularity due to the economic depression of the 1930s during which countless numbers of rural peasants moved to the cities. These audiences enjoyed and appreciated simple and colourful repetitive stories with archetypal characters. This form of escapism is common to the general population of India. As Pendakur observes,

> These audiences are mesmerised by the slick imagery that carries them into another world where men with superhuman qualities successfully conquer all odds, including bad landlords, greedy industrialists, corrupt politicians and sadistic policemen. Women generally are the icing on the cake – upholding traditional virtues of virginity, devotion to God and family and service to men.
> (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 2004: 12)

Therefore, based on the tastes of audiences, the majority of Bollywood films produced in earlier years were characterised by the repetitiveness of scenarios, songs and dances without any dramatic innovation (Raheja & Kothari 2004: 11). It seems as if there is indeed a very strong link between *masala* films and audience preference. As a result of this relationship, the emphasis on "emotion and spectacle rather than on tight narratives" has become a "formula" that filmmakers followed and which was accepted as a norm by audiences (Dudrah & Desai 2008: 29). In a sense, the characters that were created in these representations became "imagined" figures that were being idealised by audiences of the times. For many years the masses of India were content to consume these sub-standard fantasies because they served as a form of escapism from their own lives. It is notable that even though India had attained independence from British rule in 1947, filmmakers were catering to a demographic with an 18% literacy rate (Ganti 2004: 25). This was probably one of the chief reasons for the popularity of the *masala* film amongst audiences of the times.

In addition to the *masala* format of representation, between 1947 and 1990, there was a constant perpetuation of the ideas of the nationalist project into Bollywood narratives. As Virdi (2003) notes, Bollywood cinema pre-1990 was largely driven by a central pre-occupation with the nation. From as far back as the late nineteenth century, Indian nationalists argued the following,

> As long as India takes care to retain the spiritual distinctiveness of its culture, it could make all the compromises and adjustments necessary to adapt itself to the requirements of a modern material world without losing its *true identity*.
> (Chatterjee 1993: 120)

In this regard, within the context of the nationalist movement in India, Bollywood cinema played an important role in constructing and defining

dichotomies such as tradition/modernity, Indian/Western, and spiritual/ material (Ganti 2004: 3). Based on the construction of these dichotomies, India was projected as being superior to the West. In other words, these structured oppositions were used to divide India from the West and were fuelled by discourses of nationalism in colonial India. This resulted in the creation of a space that was deemed superior. As Indian nationalists aligned themselves within the geographical space occupied by India, an imaginary ideal was born.

India – An Imaginary Space

The retention of Indianness was the main focus of the nationalist project. The nationalist imaginary is represented in many Bollywood films as the home (India) which is an idealised paradise with its moral, ethical and spiritual traditions projected as being superior to that of the West (Pugsley & Khorana 2011: 360). This is particularly relevant to this discussion because Bollywood cinema has been identified as having certain attributes, which makes it the key arbiter (and for some audiences, the sole arbiter) of the national filmic imaginary (Gooptu 2011: 767). Virdi (2003: 7) agrees,

> Hindi cinema is unique in using the family as trope to negotiate caste, class, community, and gender divisions, making for complex but decipherable hieroglyphics through which it configures the nation and constructs a nationalist imaginary.

The construction of the nationalist imaginary within the context of Bollywood narratives has clearly been informed by the historiography of India coupled with the ideals of the nationalist project. According to Virdi (2003: 7), the imagined nation was constructed by promoting specific ideas about family, patriarchal regimes, notions of "ideal" subservient women and loyalty to ancient traditions. These tropes were then used to create an imaginary paradigm through which loyalty to the ideals of the nationalist project was promoted. It is relevant that the ideals that were given importance within the created paradigm are rooted in the patriotic and culture-bound traditions that were practiced in ancient India.[4] The role of women within this space is particularly important. As Virdi (2003: xiii) argues, the journey of Bollywood cinema in relation to the representation of women must be considered in correlation with its position as a "carrier of nationalist and patriotic regimes". According to the principles of the nationalist project, the strength of a "powerful Indian nation" depended upon them being relegated to powerless

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4. It has been established that many of the patriarchal structures and traditions that perpetuated into Indian societies were often based on misinterpretations of religion and myth.

positions according to which they were expected to always maintain a demeanour of acquiescence (Ram 2002: 30; Guha 1989: 9).

The constant references to the distinctions between constructed dichotomies were instrumental in fuelling the ideas of the nationalist project according to which tradition triumphed over modernity, Indianness was depicted as superior to the adoption of Western habits and finally, the spiritual space (as represented by India) was deemed to be far superior to any space in the Western world. Based on discourses of the nationalist project, Bollywood cinema became a national cinema that played out utopian ideals (Virdi 2003: 9). In a sense, India became a constructed space that was shaped by the imaginations of the nationalist project.

According to Pugsley and Khorana (2011: 360), through various representations in Bollywood films, the on-going struggles with India's post-colonial identity and its relations with former colonisers and the West in general are often played out in the visual geographies of contemporary Bollywood films. In films of earlier years that were driven by the nationalist project, characters that were not Indian were always represented as breaking the laws, displaying signs of immorality and therefore, they were always in conflict with traditional Indian values. The West was thus always represented as a marker of negativity in films that were influenced by the nationalist project (Pugsley & Khorana 2011: 360). It can therefore be argued that it is not the nation, but the *construction of the Indian nation* that is represented in popular Bollywood cinema – one that draws upon myth and history and "encapsulates India's trajectory of transition from the colonial to the post-colonial" (Gooptu 2011: 768, authors' emphasis).

Clearly, Bollywood cinema played and *continues to play* an important role in state discourses relating to development, nationhood and modernity in post-independence India (Ganti 2004: 47, authors' emphasis). However, in this regard, the views of Nehru and Gandhi differed. While Gandhi dismissed cinema as "sinful technology", Nehru believed that cinema was a powerful tool that should be used to educate and socialise the masses (Ganti 2004: 46-47). Gandhi's view of maintaining traditionalism was in direct opposition with Nehru's inclination toward modernisation. Nevertheless, despite these conflicting views, the Indian state made the transition from the era of being bound by representations of "high nationalism" to becoming more liberal (Rajadyaksha 2003: 32). As Ganti (2004: 50) notes,

> Since the late 1900's, instead of perceiving cinema as a vice, the Indian state began perceiving it as a viable, important, legitimate economic activity that should be nurtured and supported.

Over the years, and especially since 1991, after India became economically liberated, the country experienced rapid social change (Dwyer 2010: 381). This also impacted on the consumption of Bollywood films in the international arena. As Fetscherin (2010: 461) notes, during this period, the Indian

film industry became more receptive to multi-nationals and foreign invest-ments. Indian and multinational companies such as MTV India and Sony television were allowed more flexibility in terms of content as opposed to screenings of films which were largely censored and driven by nationalist themes in the past (Punathambekar 2005; Govindan & Dutta 2008; Dwyer 2010). According to Ganti (2004: 48), this was fuelled by the agenda of elected officials and bureaucrats who, subsequent to the economic liberal-isation in India, urged filmmakers to make "socially relevant" films which will "uplift" the "masses" as a means of contributing to the popularity of Bollywood films in the international arena. Thus pressure on directors to make films that embodied all the tropes of the nationalist project as well as the integration of the masala format in every film was relieved.

As a result, Bollywood filmmakers were no longer compelled to engage with notions of the "imaginary" nation (Kavoori & Punathambekar 2008: 2). The relief from previously imposed sanctions allowed them more flexibility and autonomy in relation to the construction of their narratives as well as the representation of characters. Initially, there was difficulty in overcoming the several decades of discourses that had dismissed Bollywood films as mere entertainment or "time-pass" for the illiterate masses (Dudrah & Desai 2008: 3). These challenges were embraced by filmmakers who understood the need to cater to the demands of audiences who were not content to accept sub-standard entertainment. Even though not all Bollywood filmmakers complete-ly eradicated the masala format of representation, the tendency toward a new format driven by a new manifesto was becoming increasingly evident.

In addition to open markets, the emergence of the Indian diaspora was instrumental in fuelling the popularity of Bollywood films globally. As Rajadhyaksha (2003: 28) notes, since the early 1990s, Bollywood cinema exists for, and prominently caters to a Diasporic audience of Indians.

Bollywood and the Indian Diaspora

The role of Bollywood cinema in the lives of the Indian diaspora is important. As has been established, the Indian diaspora is one of the fastest growing diasporic communities in the world (Mishra 2002: 235). More specifically, it is the post-1960 affluent emerging middle-class diaspora that have been identified as important markets for the production of Bollywood films that cater for audiences outside India. As Pugsley and Khorana (2011: 359) observe, when filmmakers began catering for the emerging middle-classes and diasporic audiences, Bollywood narratives were received in a more positive light globally.

Research reveals that the Indian diaspora's imagination of India is strongly informed by Bollywood cinema (Bandyopadhyay 2008: 79). Bandyopad-hyay (2008: 79) distinguishes between three generations of Indian diaspora

and the manner in which they perceive India after watching Bollywood films. He upholds the idea that the viewing of these films directly affects their imagination of the 'ideal' homeland. According to Bandyopadhyay, the first generations of Indians want to travel to India as a result of the nostalgia that they experience when watching Bollywood movies. The motivation for second generation Indians is to experience the 'modern' India that is depicted in many Bollywood movies. Finally, the third generation of Indians who have no links to India (i.e. those who were born outside India to Indian families) are motivated to visit the India that is romanticised in Bollywood movies.

Regardless of the generation, it seems as if the consumption of Bollywood films has become a way of life for all of these immigrants (Raheja & Kothari 2004: 10). As Dudrah and Desai (2008: 68-69) note, Bollywood films produced post-1990 deal with many of the sensibilities which constitute the diasporic subject: displacement, new beginnings and issues of belonging and alienation. Within this context, Bollywood cinema becomes a type of cultural mediator for the Indian diaspora because Bollywood narratives often negotiate with the construction of Indian diasporic identity in foreign lands.

One of the reasons for Bollywood's success globally could be attributed to representations according to which "past articulations of Indian *national identity* are no longer tied to location" (Malhotra & Alagh 2004: 28, authors' emphasis). In other words, through the emergence of Bollywood films that cater for diasporic audiences, notions of national identity become unstable because of the adoption of new cultural processes, which have been facilitated by migration away from India. As Virdi (2003: 205, authors' emphasis) notes, through the representations of east versus west and the national versus the transnational within the narratives of these new Diasporic films, the *nation (India)* is constantly *re-secured* and *re-imagined.*

Diasporic Bollywood films

Over the past two decades, Indian diaspora audiences are increasingly engaging in processes of identification with the themes and content of Bollywood films. As Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004: 11) observe, diasporic Bollywood films promote modernisation, westernisation, urbanisation, new ways of living, a sense of pan-Indianism, secularisation, the emancipation of women and the rights of minorities; and in particular, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims. In its role as a transnational cultural product, Bollywood cinema has created a cultural social space for the analysis of routine practices, rituals and traditional perceptions in the daily lives of the Indian diaspora. In catering for diasporic audiences, the narratives of these films introduce new structures of representation that feature Indian Diasporic characters dealing with issues of displacement from their homelands. Consequently, Bollywood cinema develops a new language as it travels

outside India. This new language involves a change in modes of representation.

Over time, Bollywood filmmakers began modifying earlier representations which were strictly faithful to Indian nationalism into innovative storylines in varied settings. The transformation in content and theme was translated into a positive and empowering form of culture that gave rise to a new global vision. At the same time the themes of various diasporic Bollywood films allowed the Indian diaspora to re-address their inherent commitment to traditional values while negotiating the inclusion of global cultures in their lives. Due to the transformation of Bollywood narratives and a decline in the *masala* format of representation, Bollywood cinema acquired a global audience. This is substantiated by the fact that Warner Brothers joined forces with Bollywood for a star-studded West End opening of Asoka (2001: Santosh Sivan). The film was simultaneously launched at the Venice International Film Festival and then released in Tokyo (Kaur & Sinha 2005: 17).

In her book entitled, *Beyond Bollywood: The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film,* Desai (2004: 41) notes that popular films released post-1990, have consistently appeared in the annual list of top twenty most popular foreign-language films in Britain; thus, not only luring British Asians, but also white British to the theatres.

According to Mishra (2008: 1),

> "Bollywood" has finally made it to the *Oxford English Dictionary.* The 2005 edition defines it as: "a name for the Indian popular film industry, based in Bombay. Origin 1970s -blend of Bombay and Hollywood".

Bollywood cinema has clearly become increasingly visible on an international platform. The origin of Bollywood being defined as a "blend of Bombay and Hollywood" is both interesting and true. For years, Bollywood has been "borrowing" plots from Hollywood films and then adapting them to conform to the conventions and cultures of Bollywood cinema (Ganti 2007: 440). It is this exchange or flow of ideas that has contributed to the reception of Bollywood cinema as a transnational/cultural role player.

Based on various box-office successes across the globe, Bollywood audiences continue to grow (Dasgupta 1996; Rajadhyaksha 2003; Ganti 2004; Fetscherin 2010; Novak 2010; Varia 2012). Bollywood films are now distributed to South Asia, South East Asia, East Africa, Mauritius, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Britain, Canada, Australia, the US and parts of the Soviet Union (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 2004: 10). India not only produces over 900 films annually, it is the largest film-producing country in the world (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 2004: 12). Fetscherin (2010: 461) agrees that Bollywood produces more films and sells more tickets than any other film industry in the world and adds that its revenues are "second only to those of the US film industry".

In the U.K., cinemas specialising in Bollywood films are among the most successful in the independent market and these films often make it to the box-office top ten (Raheja & Kothari 2004: 10). Based on the increase of Indian diaspora communities globally, the Bollywood film industry has become a global phenomenon (Dudrah & Desai 2008: 1). As a result, nationalism is being replaced by transnationalism and the older notions of patriarchy and adherence to the agenda of the nationalist project are now being substituted by notions of a re-defined Indianness. Transnationalism has thus opened up a space within which Indianness is constantly being re-defined within the context of societies outside India.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism allows a space to be created between the older ideologies of India and the formation of a new Indian identity away from the homeland. From this perspective, the diasporic Bollywood film is an important role player in the creation of new meaning as it provides a platform upon which to analyse the changes that are taking place in the real lives of the Indian diaspora. As Dhareshwar and Niranjana (2000: 195) observe,

> In a sense, then, these individuals come to inhabit an entirely new space constructed to meet their layered needs, and as part of that process, the films can be seen as creating a new space of signification.

In the creation of this new space, the nature of the Indian identity or the notion of Indianness emerges as an important factor that many scholars have examined (Prasad 2003: 2; Rajadyakshya 2003: 34; Sen 2005; Pugsley & Khorana 2011: 359). As Sen (2005: 73) notes,

> The nature of Indian identity is significant for those who live in India.

It is important to be aware that India's diverse religious communities such as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist amongst others make defining a singular identity problematic since this vast group is not homogenous. Due to the diversity of religion, custom and traditions in the various regions of India as well as the multitude of languages and dialects, it is difficult to group together any community as being similar. Even though many of the cultures and customs of Indians overlap, there is no stable, undisputed form of reference. Yet, despite this diversity, Bollywood cinema emerges as a nationalist force that constantly enforces various traditions, myths and cultural practices that are central to India.

It seems as if in terms of identification and engagement with Bollywood cinema, it is in effect, the geographical landscape of India that many Bollywood filmmakers post-1990 use as a stage from which to create new

identities and to question past traditions and rituals. In a sense, as Mehta argues, "Bollywood has become an emblem of a *unified* India because of its global presence" (Mishra 2008: 3, emphasis authors'). It can be argued that a part of the reason for the success of films that catered for diasporic audiences could be attributed to the sensibility of Bollywood filmmakers who recognised the need to provide Indian audiences with a frame of reference. When engaging with the importance of Indian identity for those Indians who have emigrated from India, Sen (2005: 73) argues,

> As is frequently the case with immigrants in general, the Indian diaspora is also keen on taking pride – some self-respect and dignity – in the culture and traditions of their original homeland.

Based on Sen's views, it seems apparent that there is no escaping the idea of representing India as a place of significant reference. One substantial change that has occurred in relation to the perception of the Indian diaspora who have left India in search of greener pastures is that they are no longer looked upon as having deserted their motherland (Brosius & Yazgi 2007: 358). Instead, through the narratives of Bollywood cinema, they are being re-invented as superior by fellow Indian nationals for having "made it" in the West. Therefore, as Kao and Rozario (2008: 314) argue,

> Diasporic consumption of Bollywood films thereby becomes not only a method of establishing community ties and maintaining a distinct cultural identity in a foreign land but also a reflection of diasporic pride in the homeland, one which can now be proudly displayed to the new countries they inhabit.

It is interesting that the "distinct cultural identity" is based on the imagination of an imagined nation. From a distance it is alluring. In other words, when trying to find stability or a sense of belonging in a foreign land, the notion of "culture", albeit imagined, provides a sense of relief and creates a type of identification which is comforting. Within the context of the larger global world, the Indian diaspora becomes a "new" section of a larger society. This "new" section of society often has no links to the genealogy of the Indian, except as belonging in a geographical sense. As Desai (2004: 20) notes:

> Diasporas and homelands are produced and constructed through narratives, because diasporas, like nations, evoke a time of belonging and wholeness.

The Indian diaspora are always trying to balance inherited culture with new cultures that they are exposed to outside their homeland. Since notions of "cultural" identity are problematic for the Indian diaspora, diasporic Bollywood films serve as "mediators" between the lifestyles of the Indian diaspora and the Indian state. In a sense, while the population of the Indian

diaspora represent the "greater" audience of Bollywood cinema, the films often still represent the 'imaginary' attachments to India.

It is interesting that even after the processes of transnationalism absolve individuals of maintaining loyalty to past normative structures, Bollywood filmmakers often "cling" to the old traditions and cultures of India, even if it they are only portrayed in a few short scenes throughout the films. It is important to be aware that the Indian diaspora live in different countries, speak different languages, and are engaged in different vocations. What gives them their common identity is their Indian origin, their consciousness of their cultural heritage, and their deep attachment to India (Chaturvedi 2005: 141).

Bollywood filmmakers recognise the relationship between the Indian diaspora and India and it can therefore be argued that Bollywood cinema, in its role as cultural mediator between India and the Indian diaspora attempts to develop a bond with the expatriate Indian community. According to Rajadhyaksha (2003: 34), the "new" diasporic Bollywood films occupy a crucial presence in the lives of the Indian Diasporic audiences and assume the role of "cultural unifiers" and "keepers of the flame".[5] The flame is a metaphor for the ideologies of the nation and gender that are foregrounded in the narratives of popular diasporic films. However the main point of difference is the representation of India as well as the engagement with gender politics outside India which are being re-defined within Bollywood narratives.

This re-definition takes place through an engagement with the various dichotomies that were constructed during the period of colonisation in India. Of all the dichotomies, it is the Indian/Western binary that features in most films. However, in relation to the representation of women, the binary of tradition/modernity is also relevant. The following two sections will consider Bollywood filmmakers' obsession with the notion of Indianness and the representation of women against these constructed binaries.

The Notion of Indianness

Many of the films produced in the 1990s, such as *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Chopra: 1995), *Pardes* (Ghai: 1997), *Taal (*Ghai: 1997) all highlighted Indianness as a superior trait. The difference in the construction of the narratives of these specific films was that while they promoted Indianness, they did not simultaneously depict the West as immoral. In the three films mentioned above, notions of the Indian/Western dichotomy are addressed on neutral ground, and it is of relevance that they do not subscribe to past notions of right and wrong.

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5.   Since the 1990s, Indian Diasporic audiences have become increasingly important and influential (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 2004: 2).

Through the representations of diasporic characters in these films, notions of culture and identity are also questioned. Narratives in these films are structured to present a "loss of traditional values and culture" and then the re-invention of a "new" set of values and culture. These representations often coax the Indian diaspora to question their identities and their place in the new worlds that they have adopted as their own. In a sense, as Prasad (2003: 2) observes, "Bollywood cinema has brought the Indian diaspora decisively into the centre of the picture, as a more stable figure of Indian identity than anything that can be found indigenously." Nevertheless, Bollywood film-makers still attempt to avoid complete conflation with the West and struggle to maintain their own versions of Indianness within their narrative structures and representation of characters.

The notion of Indianness will be examined through a brief discussion of the film *Dilwaale Dulhania le Jayenge* (Chopra: 1995). This film is popularly referred to as *DDLJ*[6] and has been identified as being instrumental in actively bridging the gap between Bollywood cinema and the West. It made its mark in the Bollywood film industry as a film that would resonate with viewers long after its release. It is one of the largest earners in Indian film history and continues to be screened, drawing in audiences more than a decade after its release. According to Mishra (2002: 250),

> *DDLJ* was Bollywood's first full-blown reading of the narratives of migrancy and displacement.

Kapur (2009: 222) argues that the popularity of this film could be attributed to the fact that it shaped a particular genre of glossy 'family-centred feel good' film focused on a romantic story which emerged in the 1990s and crossed over into North America and the UK. It is a film that has established itself within the realms of popular culture as a cultural text that resonates strongly with viewers in India as well as abroad. It is the manner in which the notion of Indianness is dealt with in this film that is of relevance to this discussion. A brief overview of the film is provided before addressing the diverse representation of Indianness through the constructed Indian/Western dichotomy within the film's narratives.

Brief Overview

Briefly, *DDLJ* deals with two second generation Indian diaspora characters living in Britain, Simran and Raj. Simran is the elder daughter of con-venience

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6.   *DDLJ* is the shortened name given to the film *Dilwaale Dulhania Le Jayenge.* The names of many popular Bollywood films are often shortened by using the first letter of every word in the title for ease of reference. For the purposes of this study, the acronym *DDLJ* will be used.

store owner Baldev Singh; a traditional Indian male who yearns to be back in his homeland: Punjab, India. He has a conservative outlook toward life and is content in the belief that his two daughters and wife have maintained their ritual prayers and connection to India, albeit living in Britain. The hero is Raj, the only son of Dharamvir Malhotra, a wealthy businessman. In contrast with the Singh family, Raj and his father Dharamvir Malhotra do not candidly display any affiliation to India or its culture.

When Baldev receives a letter from his childhood friend asking for his daughter's hand in marriage (a union that was informally agreed to when they were children), he informs his daughter that she will marry his best friend's son Kuljeet, who lives in India. Simran is wary, having cherished fantasies of a mysterious knight in shining armour whom she may one day fall in love with, but being a "dutiful" daughter, she agrees to marry the man her father has chosen for her.

However, before the wedding, she begs her father to allow her to go on a trip to Europe with her friends. She views this experience as her last chance to see the world before her marriage to a complete stranger and before her relocation to India takes place. It is during this trip that Simran and Raj meet and fall in love. The moment that Simran's father discovers that his daughter is in love with Raj, he relocates the family to India in an attempt to disengage himself with both the "immoral West" and the character of Raj whom he classifies as insolent and "too Western". When Raj and his father follow Simran's family to India, Simran's 'Indian' fiancé Kuljeet is exposed as an immoral, lustful and opportunistic individual. After recognising Raj as a decent man, Baldev allows his daughter to marry him.

Diverse forms of Indianness

The important point of difference in the representation of the "Indian/ Western" dichotomy in *DDLJ* is the narrative structure which highlights the diasporic male protagonists adherence to Indian family values as he shuns the idea of eloping with the woman he loves (Dwyer 2005: 76-78). Simul-taneously, the national Indian male is depicted as having loose morals and behaves inappropriately in his interactions with his prospective bride. As Dwyer and Patel (2002: 217) note, in *DDLJ*, it is the diasporic male who is more determined to uphold traditional Indian values than his elders or the local Punjabi men. In earlier Bollywood films, the diasporic male would have shunned Indian culture and traditions. This representation suggests that change has taken place within the stereotypical assumptions that locate the West as a marker of corruptness.

According to Dudrah (2006: 45), these films are intentionally produced for Indian diaspora audiences. Due to the changes in perception of the new generation of youth, as well as the heightened profile of the South Asian

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immigrant community in Britain, Europe and North America, Indian commercial and regional cinemas are now even more popular outside the subcontinent. Desai (2004: 40) contends that Bollywood films are made to attract audiences outside India because of the Indian diaspora. Since new generations of Indians are being born outside India, they have no affiliation to India, its rich heritage or its customs. The diasporic Bollywood films that are increasingly being produced post-1990 cater for these emerging diaspora communities. *DDLJ*, together with other diasporic films released in the 1990s such as, *Pardes* (Ghai 1997), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Johar 1998) *Taal* (Ghai 1999), *Dil to Pagal Hai* (Chopra 1997) created a global euphoria for Bollywood films and its actors (Desai & Dudrah 2008: 1). At the same time, as Raheja and Kothari (2004: 121-122) argue, they also expressed "an enraptured romantic temperament, but operated within the safe parameters of tradition".

Even though the Indian diaspora have emigrated from India, the constructed Indian/Western dichotomy continues to present a challenge to their identity formation in foreign countries. It can be argued that the "genealogy of Indian migration and its strong links to the colonial experience" play an important role in preventing the Indian diaspora from completely breaking free from past structures (Pugsley & Khorana 2011: 363). It can also be argued that the films of the 1990s initiated a positive conflation between India, as represented in Bollywood films, and the West, which in the past, was always represented as a marker of immorality. On the other hand, the constant negotiation with these very dichotomies within Bollywood narratives can also be viewed as processes that assist the diaspora in assimilating with other cultures. The reality that contemporary Bollywood filmmakers project through the narratives of these films is that there will be a re-negotiation of adherence to older norms and cultures as exposure to new cultures increases. Hence, there is the initiation of a new dialogue that justifies a deeper analysis into the reasons for these changes and the changing philosophies.

The Representation of Women

The representation of women in Bollywood cinema is an integral part of this discussion since they have also been affected by the colonial experience. Similar to the manner in which diasporic identity in general is being reinvented through Bollywood narratives, it is of relevance that the agency of the female character in Bollywood films has evolved in parallel to the changing position and role of women in India. In relation to the plight of women in India, the following has been established: in the 18th century, Indian women were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields (De Souza 1975: 78-81); the 19th century witnessed a change in women's roles from subjugation to greater

emancipation from male domination (Roy 2006: 55). While the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation initiated further changes (Ross 1961: 117), it was the 20th century that brought about dynamic changes and new concepts for Indian women affording them status with "a fresh dignity and importance" (Roy 2006: 55). Taking this trajectory into consideration, Bollywood filmmakers have integrated the plight of women in India into the context of their narratives. Female representation in popular Bollywood films is therefore central to this discussion. In this regard, in line with the project of nationalism, Gangoli (2005: 148) observes,

> The ideal Indian Hindu woman, represented by the heroine, the hero's mother and /or sister is quintessentially Indian and is compliant with the wishes of the hero, embodying the male/patriarchal view. In contrast, the vamp is Anglo-Indian or "westernized", most often sexually promiscuous and knowing as opposed to the "innocent" heroine. Thus, the vamp is located as being the outsider to "Indianness" and to Indian norms and traditions.

While stereotypical representations of women were common fare in earlier Bollywood films, over the years, Bollywood filmmakers began negotiating with the various constructed dichotomies such as Indian/Western and tradition/modernity. This became evident in the changing narratives and tendencies of Bollywood filmmakers to be less faithful to older modes of representations, specifically in relation to women. The changes that were represented through the depiction of female characters in popular Bollywood films can be linked to the evolution of women's role in Indian society.

When women in India were victims of the traditions that were imposed upon widows, then films such as *Prem Rog* (Kapoor 1982) and *Baabul* (Chopra 2006) echoed the plight of these victims. When women were being subjugated due to the prevailing norms of mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationships, films such as *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (Dutt 1962) and *Ek Din Bahu Ka* (Gautam 1983) exposed the dominant patriarchal nature of such relationships. Similarly, many of the traditions that were practised in ancient India were constantly being exposed by filmmakers in India who understood and sympathised with the plight of women which was the result of a blind following of culture, tradition and myth. As Virdi (2003: xiv) so aptly observes, Bollywood films are now "deeply imbricated in social trans-formation". In this regard, it is necessary to understand the clear division in the representation of women in Bollywood films pre-1990 and post-1990. Films made post-1990 are important because they locate the female character as an autonomous being on various levels.

In the past, the figure of the mythological Sita was representative of the "ideal" woman in Bollywood cinema. Thereafter, when the "modern" woman was introduced in films such as *Thodisi Bewafaii* (Shroff 1980), she was painted in a negative light in order to maintain the older "status quo" of traditionalism. As Sen (quoted in Kaur & Sinha 2005: 144) notes, in earlier

Bollywood films, modern representations of women projected them as being sexually promiscuous and disrupting the colonial agenda by being projected as "pathetic victims of displacement and boredom". Through such diverse representations of women, the Indian/Western binary was focalised and it insinuated that modernity was synonymous with negative traits in women.

In response to these modern representations of women, the centrality of the mother-theme was perpetuated through films like *Mother India* (Khan: 1957) and *Deewar* (Chopra 1975). The mother-theme was influential in mobilising women into subordinate roles within which they were depicted as either mothers of sons or wives of men. In highlighting the role of women as always being relatives to men in this manner, women were pigeon-holed into specific roles. Subsequently, as nationalist sanctions against represent-ations of women were lifted, Bollywood filmmakers were able to depict women in a variety of roles.

For example, within the narratives of the "new" Diasporic Bollywood films, the burden of motherhood has been taken away from the female character. In both *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Advani 2003) and *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (Johar 2006) the single mother (Jennifer) and the widow (Kamaljeet) live with their respective family units. Both women work outside the home and are depicted as independent individuals. There is clearly no element of subordination in their lives, and they are not depicted as secondary individuals in terms of their relation to men. This formula of representation in relation to the depiction of women is gaining momentum and films like *Salaam Namaste* (Anand 2005) and *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Johar 2001) deal with the changing realities of a world that is fuelled and influenced by transnationalism. It seems as if Bollywood filmmakers are continuously attempting to delineate women's challenges through the medium of cinema. In relation to both the nation and gender politics, many popular diasporic films produced post-1990 suggest the possibility of cultures being able to meet on neutral ground positively. This in turn, dismantles the nationalist paradigm of women having to choose between two worlds.[7]

Cultural Hybridity

The idea of cultures meeting on neutral ground is dealt with in many contemporary Bollywood films. This significant space of neutrality can be examined by means of Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, in which he forwards the notion of the third space of enunciation. As Bhabha (1994: 37) notes,

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7. Two worlds refer to Chatterjee's (1993: 121) theory in which he claims that the nationalist project clearly distinguishes between the inner world (home/spiritual) and the outer world (Western/material).

> It is that third space, though un-representable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew.

In line with the representations of diasporic characters in Bollywood films, it seems as if a third space of enunciation has been created through which the authority of the old culture as a solid foundation is being questioned. This has been facilitated by transnationalism and the merging representations of various cultures in diasporic Bollywood films. As a result, the old "flame" is being redefined. Bhabha (1994) argues that it is necessary to let go of colonialism and view it as something locked in the past, otherwise our collective histories and cultures will intrude on the present. In doing so, we will be able to transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations. However, at the same time, it is important to accept that acquiring under-standing in terms of different cultures will be laced with challenges because the reality of one culture may be the fiction of another.

Due to transnationalism and the merging of representations of various cultures in diasporic Bollywood films, the authoritative idea of culture having a solid foundation has been significantly unsettled. In line with Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity, the narratives of certain Bollywood films also question controversial issues while challenging perceptions of older stereo-types. In a sense, Bollywood filmmakers are using Bhabha's model in their representations which are becoming increasingly culturally integrated.

Appadurai's observation (quoted in Kao & Rozario 2008: 314) in relation to the processes that occur between audiences and film is also relevant,

> The lines between the realistic and fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that, the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to create imagined worlds which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world.

It is important to be aware that Bollywood films, like other films, have an escapist dimension. Through realistic and fictional landscapes, evolutionary processes emerge. The evolution that is taking place within the Bollywood film industry can be related to Bhabha's (1994: 141) notions of hybridity and the elements of fluidity for he notes,

> If, in our travelling theory, we are alive to the metaphoricity of the peoples of imagined communities – migrant or metropolitan – then we shall find that the space of the modern nation-people is never simply horizontal. Their meta-phoric movement requires a kind of "doubleness" in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic.

These types of metaphors are repeatedly utilised in the narratives of Diasporic Bollywood films. There is a constant engagement with issues of past "imagined communities" versus the adoption of new cultures in foreign lands. The tendency of Bollywood filmmakers to evolve and venture beyond traditional modes of representation is proving to be successful. The increase of migration from India also had an impact on both the narrative structures, as well as character representations in Bollywood films.

In reality, the audience for Bollywood films is not limited to the masses of India anymore, but extends to various parts of the world to include not only the Indian diaspora, but people of all cultures and religions. As Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2004: 13) note, Indian cinema, like most other cinemas evolved over time responding to various political contexts and challenges. Films which cater for emerging diaspora audiences/markets are proving to be economically viable. As a result, Bollywood cinema has established itself as a transnational/cultural role player for various audiences worldwide.

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